

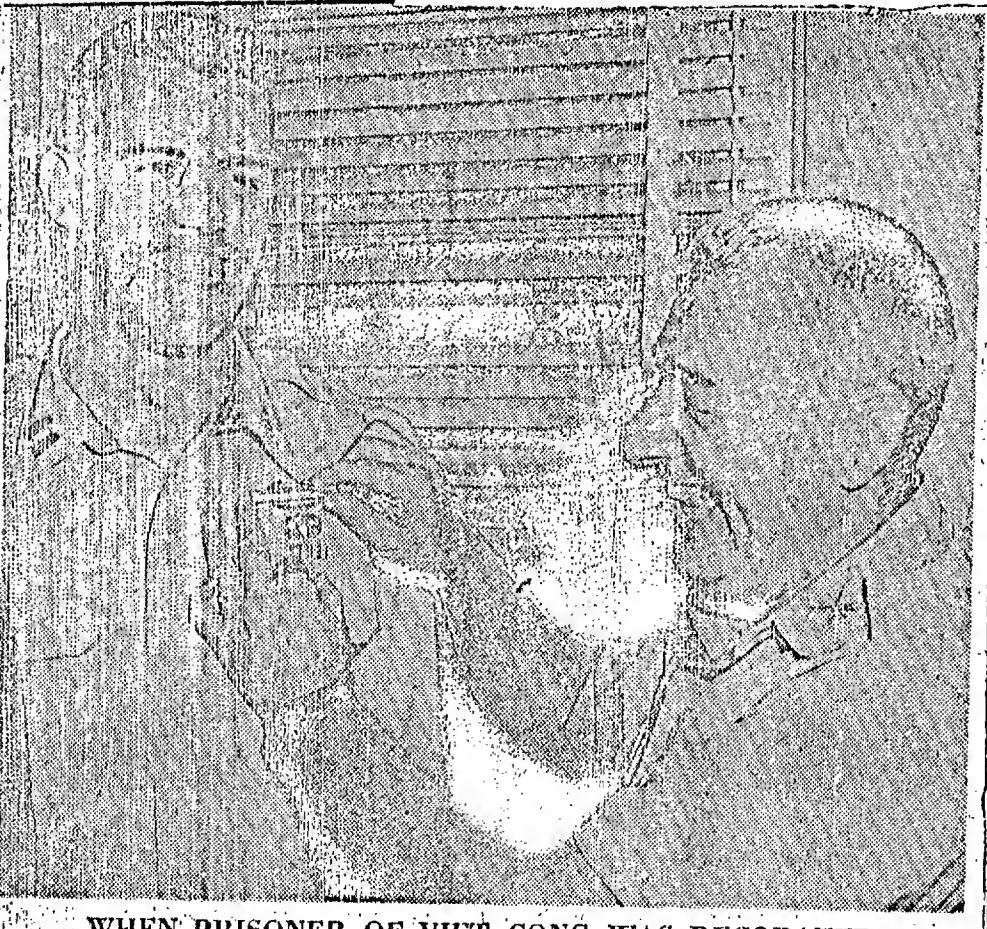
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Approved For Release 2005/01/05 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000700650012-4

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Date: OCT 22 1964

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PERSI 19740661 Humbert Roque
Cape
Vietnam
MIL 4-09 Vietnam



WHEN PRISONER OF VIET CONG WAS DECORATED

... Col. Versace, now retired, pinned medal on son, Capt. "Rock" Versace, at Ft. Meade in July, 1963.

A Mother's 'Grapevine' Confirms Son Held by Viet Cong Is Alive

By KENT ADAMS

"Our Rock is a pretty, resourceful fellow. Any day I expect him to come tramping across the rice paddies with a Viet Cong under each arm — both, reciting the Rosary."

The speaker is Mrs. Tere Rios Versace, of the 500 block Hazlett Ave. "Rock" is her 27-year-old Capt. Humbert Roque Versace, who has been held prisoner by the Viet Cong since Oct. 29 of last year.

The fact that Rock is undeniably alive and well was confirmed—not by the Defense or State Departments—not by the Central Intelligence Agency or the Counter Intelligence Corps—but by the resourcefulness and determination of Mrs. Versace herself.

SHE IS DAIL Ycompiling information on her son's well-being from a vast and varied reservoir of private sources she calls her "grapevine," which includes merchants, newsmen, service personnel, priests, Americans, Chinese and Vietnamese she and her retired husband, Col. Humbert J. Versace, have encountered in their 28 years of life in the U. S. Army.

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partment telling how her son, another officer, and a medic N.C.O. were captured when Communists overran their Special Forces camp at Tan Phu, deep in the southern province of An Xuyen.

Government telegrams continued to assure the Versace family they would be "promptly notified" if additional information was received, and told them a Vietnamese general was offering a reward of \$3,000 for the return of captured American advisers.

SEVERAL WEEKS passed, and when Mrs. Versace contacted the Vietnamese attaché in Washington, he was told that U.S. forces were able to free the men. Queries to the Army brought no positive re-

sults, and the difficult job of learning of her son's safety and health began.

To add to her disappointment, a shift of power in the country removed the general offering the reward and it was not continued by the in-coming group.

Several weeks of letter-writing began to produce both encouraging and interesting results from her friends on the "grapevine" in Vietnam.

MRS. VERSACE learned from a priest that her son was alive, and apparently in good health, though he had suffered a minor head wound. Her sources also told her "a Negro officer" was seen with Rock, indicating that Sgt. Daniel Pitzer was also alive.

The grapevine continued, saying that Sgt. Pitzer left the safety of friendly troops and had returned at the height of the battle to aid Rock and Lt. James Rowe, who had also been wounded.

That act of unselfish heroism was another bit of information which was not made known to the press or to the sergeant's wife.

AFTER FIVE weeks had passed with nothing more than form telegrams from the Defense Department saying "no new information" had been gained about her son, an article in a news magazine described how two Viet Cong captives were being "forced to parade through villages with ropes around their necks, sometimes crawling on their hands and knees," to apologize for "crimes against the people."

From her grapevine, Mrs. Versace learned it was Rock and Sgt. Pitzer who were the captives. Because of her background as a free-lance writer, she tried to en-

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